A

SERMON

CONCERNING THE

DIVINE ATTRIBUTES;

PREACHED AT

BATTLE IN SUSSEX,

By the Reverend Sir WILLIAM GRAHAM, Baronet,
Lord PRESTON.

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MDCCLXVI.

TO

Sir WHISTLER WEBSTER, Bart.

THIS DISCOURSE

IS INSCRIBED,

As a Teſtimony of GRATITUDE,

By his obliged

And reſpectful Servant,

Battle, Suſſex.
Oct. 7, 1765.

PRESTON.

PSALM cvi. Ver. 1. *Praiſe ye the Lord.*

DID we ſeriouſly reflect upon the manifold bleſſings, which God, *the great author of our being*, in plentiful ſtreams ſhowers down upon us; did we, in a ſuitable manner, reflect upon his glorious attributes, *we ſhould continually praiſe the Lord*, and break forth with St. *Paul* in his pious acknowledgment, *In thee, O Lord, I live, move, and have my being.* We ſhould be afraid of offending him; his goodneſs would excite ſentiments of gratitude in our breaſts: in ſhort, we ſhould make it our chief concern to praiſe him.

In order that I may induce you to act agreeably to *David*'s advice, *Praiſe the Lord*, I ſhall explain to you the nature of his natural, and moral attributes: Eternity independance, ſelf-exiſtence, omnipotence, omnipreſence, omniſcience, immutability, and neceſſary exiſtence, are his natural attributes; goodneſs, wiſdom, juſtice, truth, faithfulneſs, holineſs, and mercy, are his moral attributes.

That God is eternal, follows from his being the firſt cauſe of all things: we did not form ourſelves: we are therefore dependant upon ſome ſuperior Being for our exiſtence. Matter is inactive, and cannot move, unleſs

ſome ſuperior force be applied to it. Some ſpirit therefore muſt be the cauſe of motion: and, as that Spirit is God, and he is the cauſe, and author of all things, he conſequently muſt be eternal.

Independance: This attribute flows from eternity: as God is the cauſe and author of all things, he muſt reign ſupreme over all things, and conſequently be independant.

Self-exiſtence: Self-exiſtence flows alſo from eternity: whatever is eternal muſt be endowed with ſelf-exiſtence: God is eternal; therefore God is ſelf-exiſtent.

Omnipotence flows alſo from eternity: This attribute may be proved from the beautiful works of the creation: *Fiat*, ſays God, that is, *Let it be done, and it was done.* God's *fiat* ſummoned every thing into exiſtence.----*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void, and darkneſs was upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.---The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament ſheweth his handy-work.*

And God ſaid, *Let there be light, and there was light.* Γενηθήτωφῶς καὶ ἐγενετοφῶς γενηθω, καὶ ἐγένετο. *Let the earth*, ſaith God, *bring forth graſs; the herb yielding ſeed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind. Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and the fowl that may fly above the earth. Out of the ground God formed every beaſt of the field, and every fowl of the air. I have made the earth,*

earth, ſaith God, *the man, and the beaſt, that are upon the ground, by my great power, and by my outſtretched arm.* From an awful conſideration of God's power, the Pſalmiſt breaks forth into this pious meditation, *O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all.*

Omnipreſence, or being preſent in all places: God, as a Spirit, cannot be confined to any ſpace: matter *may* be confined; a ſpirit cannot. *Thou art about my path,* ſays holy David, *and about my bed, and ſpieſt out all my ways. Whither ſhall I go then, from thy Spirit? and whither ſhall I go from thy preſence? If I climb up into heaven, thou art there; if I go down into hell, thou art there alſo; if I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea, even there alſo ſhall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand ſhall hold me.*

Omniſcience, or all knowledge: God, who formed all things, muſt thoroughly know all things: he, who formed the heart, knows all the avenues of the heart.

Immutability, or unchangeableneſs: This attribute viſibly appears in the works of the creation. The planets never vary from their eſtabliſhed courſes. *Fire and hail,* ſays the Pſalmiſt, *ſnow and vapour, fulfil his word.* It ſhould not therefore be ſaid, (to uſe the expreſſion of the learned Biſhop Pearſon,) that there is a greater coldneſs in us than there is in ſnow. Chriſt's diſciples once marvelled, and ſaid, *What manner of man is this! that even the winds and the ſea obey him?* How much

much more ſhould we wonder at all diſobedient Chriſtians, and ſay, What manner of men are theſe, who refuſe obedience unto him, whom the ſenſeleſs creatures, the winds, and the ſea, obeyed? The herbs, plants, and flowers, proceed continually in the ſame manner. In ſhort, there is a ſameneſs in all nature, which to an unprejudiced mind demonſtrates the truth of this attribute.

Neceſſary exiſtence: This attribute has occaſioned many controverſies in the learned world. A celebrated writer obſerves, that, as God is ſelf-exiſtent, he muſt neceſſarily, that is, abſolutely exiſt. Self-exiſtence, therefore, and neceſſary exiſtence, are one and the ſame attribute.

I now proceed to explain the nature of God's moral attributes. Firſt, I ſhall treat of his goodneſs. Goodneſs is that *glorious* attribute, which appears in the moſt *amiable* colours throughout the univerſe. The harmony and beauty of the world, *declare God's goodneſs to the children of men. When our knees are weak through faſting, and our fleſh is dried up for want of fatneſs: when we are become a reproach, and they that look upon us, ſhake their heads; The Lord our God helps us, and ſaves us, according to his mercy. Though our enemies curſe, yet God gives us his bleſſing, and confounds thoſe who riſe up againſt us.* Without the goodneſs of the Almighty, the moſt valuable gifts of nature, and fortune, would be uſeleſs. Without his goodneſs, the laborious huſbandman could not reap the fruits of his honeſt labours:

bours: unleſs God crowned his labours with ſucceſs, his tilling, and manuring the land would be ineffectual; and the ſeed, *the very bread he eats*, would rot in the fallow, the graſs wither, and his grounds remain an unfruitful, barren waſte: unleſs God gives a bleſſing to the gifts, which he beſtows upon us, we cannot enjoy them, either to his glory, or our own advantage. By God's goodneſs, the boſom of the earth unfolds her fragrant ſtores; the fields rejoice, and ſmile in the infancy of plenty, and the woods ſprout into a beautiful verdure. The ſame divine hand is as neceſſary to ſupport the noble fabric of the univerſe, as at firſt to frame and compile it. *He ſendeth the ſprings into the rivers, which run among the hills. He gives us rain from heaven, ſoft as the ſwanny down, and fruitful ſeaſons, filling our hearts with gladneſs. He watereth the hills from above; the earth is filled with the fruit of his works. He bringeth forth graſs for the cattle, and green herbs for the ſervice of men. He bringeth food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, oil to make him a chearful countenance, and bread to ſtrengthen his heart. The trees of the Lord are full of ſap; even the cedars of Libanus, which he hath planted; wherein the birds make their neſts, and the fir-trees are a dwelling for the ſtork; wherein the high hills are a refuge for the wild goats, and the ſtony rocks for the conies; wherein the lofty mountains bleat, and the vallies ſtand ſo thick with corn, that they laugh and ſing.*

Wiſdom: This attribute appears from God's excellent contrivance of all his creatures, and continuing them in being. The exquiſite beauty and ſteady revolutions of the ſun, moon, and ſtars, are demonſtrations of his wiſdom, as well as power. If from contemplating the heavens, we view the earth, the admirable frame, and texture of all things therein, we ſee the moſt lively characters of God's wiſdom. If we conſider ourſelves, *the curious needle-work of our bodies, which are weaved with ſinews, and embroidered with veins*, we muſt ſay with the Pſalmiſt, *that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.* If we deſcend lower, and view the creatures ſubject to man, we ſhall find the birds of the air, *thoſe feathered choriſters*, chaunting the praiſes of their Maker; *the fiſhes of the ſea declaring his wonders in the deep, and the beaſts of the field, as ſo many heralds, proclaiming his wiſdom.* We may view marks of his wiſdom in the herbs, and graſs of the field: *The lillies, though they neither toil, ſpin, or contribute any thing toward their beautiful colour, exceed* Solomon, *though ſplendidly arrayed in all his glory.* If no book was ever compoſed by the accidental meeting together of letters and words, without an author, how abſurd is it to imagine, that ſo fair and beautiful a work as the creation, ſhould owe its riſe to any cauſe, wiſdom excepted. Conſcience, *that boſom monitor*, is a proof of God's wiſdom. I appeal to you; when you conſcientiouſly diſcharge your duty, do ye not perceive a pleaſing

a pleaſing ſerenity, and ſelf-complacency in your minds? On the contrary, when ye indulge any vicious deſire, or tranſgreſs God's laws, do not your conſciences ſeverely reprimand, and reproach you?

Juſtice: Juſtice is *that attribute*, which diſpoſes the Almighty to reward the good, and puniſh the wicked; that is, reward virtue, and puniſh iniquity. A reflection upon this attribute is ſufficient to ſilence the complaints of the unhappy: *When*, ſays the royal Pſalmiſt, *we are miniſhed and brought low through oppreſſion, through any plague, or trouble, though God ſuffer us to be evil intreated by tyrants, and lets us wander out of the way in the wilderneſs; yet will he help the poor out of miſery, and make him houſholds, like a flock of ſheep.* He can reinſtate the injured in their juſt poſſeſſions, and *help them to right who have for many years ſuffered wrong. He can relieve thoſe, who every night waſh their bed, and water their couch with tears.*

Truth: This attribute appears from that regard, which God ſhews the truly good chriſtian, whom he rewards according to his righteous dealing: *Heaven and earth*, ſays God, *may paſs away, but my word ſhall not paſs away.* All his gracious promiſes will certainly be fulfilled. *God is a God of truth.*

Faithfulneſs: This is the ſame attribute with his truth.

Holineſs: Holineſs has various ſignifications; it implies God's regard for virtue, and hatred to vice. *The*

righteous Lord, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *loveth righteouſneſs: his countenance will behold the thing that is juſt. The words of the Lord are pure words, even as the ſilver, which from the earth is tried, and purified ſeven times in the fire. Lord*, ſays *David, who ſhall dwell in thy holy tabernacle, or who ſhall reſt upon thy holy hill? Even he that leadeth an uncorrupt life, and doth the thing which is right, and ſpeaketh the truth from his heart. He that hath uſed no deceit in his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbour, and hath not (the worſt character in the world) ſlandered his neighbour. He that ſetteth not by himſelf, but is lowly in his own eyes, and maketh much of them that fear the Lord. He that ſweareth unto his neighbour, and diſappointeth him not, though it were to his own hinderance. He that hath not given his money upon uſury; nor taken reward againſt the innocent. Whoſo doth theſe things ſhall never fail.* As God is holy, he conſequently takes pleaſure, and delights in holineſs.

Mercy: This is that *glorious attribute*, which chears, and animates the drooping ſpirits of the contrite, and penitent ſinner. *When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedneſs and doth that, which is lawful and right, he ſhall ſave his ſoul alive.* What inexpreſſible comfort does this impart to the true penitent! *The ſacrifices of God are a broken ſpirit: a broken, and contrite heart God will not deſpiſe. To the Lord our God belong mercies, and forgiveneſſes, though we have rebelled againſt him.*

him. What encouragement is this to induce the vicious to acknowledge his tranſgreſſions, *and place his ſins ever before him; to intreat God to hide his face from his ſins, and to blot out his iniquities! God pardoneth, and abſolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy goſpel. He deſireth not the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn from his wickedneſs, and live.*

To conclude: May a knowledge of theſe adorable attributes of God maintain a due influence upon our lives and converſations; and, as we cannot take a view of the heavens, the earth, ourſelves, or any other creature, without diſcovering the ſtrongeſt evidences of the Divine Being, and *his Almighty power*, may a ſenſe of it animate us in the diſcharge of our duty. As his attributes are known to us by *the viſible works of the creation*, may we, with a pious awe and reverence, conſider, and reflect upon them as reaſonable creatures: As we are endowed with underſtanding, may theſe glorious objects be the ſubjects of our frequent meditations: May a ſenſe of God's eternity perſuade us that, as He is the author of our being, to Him alone is due our obedience. Of his independence, that on Him we are dependant: of his ſelf-exiſtence, that he has exiſted from all eternity, and does not depend for that exiſtence on any cauſe; of his omnipotence, that however unhappy we may be, it is in God's power to make us perfectly eaſy: of his omnipreſence, that he is preſent

in all places: of his omniſcience, that he is intimately acquainted with all our thoughts, words, and actions; and that nothing can poſſibly be concealed from his all-ſeeing eye: of his immutability, that he is unchangeable, ever the *ſame good, kind, gracious God*, and that if we behave properly, *he will fulfil all his promiſes*, and give us life eternal: of his neceſſary exiſtence, that He cannot but exiſt, and will for ever continue to us the uninterrupted poſſeſſion of everlaſting happineſs, and glory. May a ſenſe of his goodneſs, and mercy inſtill into our minds ingenuous ſentiments, induce us to confeſs, and repent of our ſins, in a firm perſuaſion, that he will pardon us. May a ſenſe of his *juſtice, truth, and faithfulneſs*, perſuade us, that we ſhall have an impartial trial at the laſt day, and that, if we do our duty, his truth and faithfulneſs will be exerted *in fulfilling all his promiſes*. When God's goodneſs excites our gratitude, we take the moſt effectual method of increaſing, and prolonging our happineſs. A reflection upon his goodneſs will teach us modeſty, and humility, *the beſt ſecurity, and ornament of a Chriſtian*. May we place our truſt in God alone: our thoughts, our words, our actions, will then be the emblems of our love, and gratitude. *That* holy frame of mind, which diſpoſes us to truſt in him, *to caſt all our care upon him who careth for us*, will have a ſteady influence upon our lives, and manners. The ſame principle, which renders us humble towards God, will reſtrain

us from pride (the worſt quality imaginable,) towards our neighbour. We ſhall eſteem it as our indiſpenſible duty, not only to glorify God by praiſes, and thankſgivings, but alſo by a proper uſe of his bleſſings, and *tender loving mercies*. The royal Pſalmiſt had certain experience of this, and may each of us have the ſame. *God*, ſays he, *is our hope, and ſtrength, a very preſent help in trouble.*

God hath given us that ſacred book the Holy Scriptures, wherein the riches of his wiſdom, and goodneſs are clearly diſplayed. Let us therefore diligently read, and ſtudy God's holy word contained in them. We ſhall thereby be acquainted with his nature, and will; we ſhall worſhip, and adore him, and from the diſcoveries which we make of him, *learn to praiſe, and magnify him.* And here permit me to intreat all maſters, and miſtreſſes of families to ſpend their leiſure hours in peruſing the Holy Scriptures. Example is very prevailing: it has charms which few can reſiſt: when all the exhortations of the moſt celebrated preachers have been ineffectual, example has produced the deſired effect. If the valet imitates his maſter in the faſhion of his cloaths, and the woman her lady, certainly examples of piety and virtue will occaſion the ſame influence over thoſe, who are under the ſame roof.

Let us therefore ſummon all our faculties, conſtantly *remember* God, meditate on his manifold works, and regard the voice of conſcience, *the language of our hearts*,

hearts, which will accuſe, or excuſe us, as we obſerve, or neglect our duty.

If we purſue enjoyments of an innocent nature, we are blameleſs. If any enjoyment be miſchievous to us, we are falſe to our intereſt if we deſire it. Under theſe reſtrictions, our purſuits will be crowned with ſucceſs. What an inexpreſſible honor, and happineſs is it to the children of men to have ſuch a *patron*, ſuch a *benefactor*, ſuch a *friend*, as *God Almighty! a friend ſo kind, and conſtant*, as never to deſert thoſe, *who do not deſert him:* whoſe favours are *ineſtimable*, *whoſe bounty is inexhauſtible*: upon whom we entirely depend for all the bleſſings of this life, and the hopes of everlaſting happineſs in the next. May it therefore, my chriſtian brethren, as a grateful return for thoſe ineſtimable bleſſings, which the Almighty beſtows upon us, *our creation, preſervation, and redemption, the means of preſent grace, and the hopes of future glory*, be the chief buſineſs of our lives *to praiſe the Lord.*

To that Almighty Being be aſcribed, by us, and by all men, as is moſt due, all honor, power, might, majeſty and dominion, now, henceforth, and for evermore. *Amen.*

THE END.